

SUMMARY

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH

Workshop on Underrepresented Racial/Ethnic Minority Training

**Hyatt Regency Hotel
Bethesda, Maryland
October 5, 1999**

I. Introduction and Charge to the Committee

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) convened a workshop on October 5, 1999 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Bethesda, Maryland as the first step in a process to assess the progress of and steps for improvement in its underrepresented minority training programs. The workshop provided a forum to discuss issues and problems related to the NIMH goal of increasing the number of well-trained racial/ethnic minorities in areas relevant to mental health and mental illness. Continued racial health disparities added urgency to the task. Recognizing that the NIMH has sponsored a number of training programs over the years with the ultimate goal of increasing the number of underrepresented minority researchers, coupled with the seriousness of the health disparities problem, the Institute and its National Advisory Mental Health Council (NAMHC) agreed that it was time to seriously assess both the successes of the NIMH programs and the 'roadblocks' to their success and, if warranted, to consider alternative approaches to achieve training objectives. To begin what will be a long evaluation process, the NIMH called upon members of the NAMHC; national leaders in the minority community, especially those who serve as directors of training programs; successful junior and senior minority investigators, most of whom have completed various minority-focused training programs; NIMH staff, especially those responsible for administering the various training programs; and special guests such as Dr. Harold C. Slavkin, Director, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) and Dr. Marvin Cassman, Director, National Institute of General Medical Sciences represented by Dr. Clifton Poodry.

Dr. Steven Hyman, Director, NIMH, charged the group to advise the Institute on its successes, but more importantly to identify the impediments to attracting underrepresented minorities into the training *pipeline* and ultimately into biomedical research. He urged the group to join the NIMH to "... *thoughtfully recommit ourselves to promote opportunities for talented, scientifically-interested young people to pursue careers in biomedical research.*" This mission was echoed by Dr. Richard Nakamura, Deputy Director, NIMH when he encouraged the participants to help the NIMH "...*improve the state of the art in terms of improving the performance of our programs*" and to help identify the reasons why so few underrepresented minorities are completing their training in spite of the numbers that seem to be entering.

Dr. Carolyn Strete, Chairperson, and Associate Director, Research Integration and Dissemination Division of Mental Disorders, Behavior Research and AIDS, NIMH, set the stage of the meeting by advising the group that their comments were extremely important because they would assist the Council in its effort to learn about the successes of NIMH's Underrepresented Minority Training Programs, and the challenges that remain.

To address this problem, participants were divided into five panels and three *roundtables*, each with a specific topic (see discussion below). While this was not viewed as a consensus conference, the panelists presented a number of important issues for both success and impediments to success. Their compelling

comments fell into distinct themes and ranged from the philosophical – the best time in a student's life to expose them to the insightful thinking process of the scientific method - to the practical - how to consistently guarantee funding and support to carry students from one phase of their education to another. Dr. Strete encouraged the participants to look critically at the issues, advise the NIMH on what is working, and suggest tasks that remain to be done.

II. Panel Discussions

Panel I

Achieving Racial/Ethnic Diversity in Biomedical/Behavioral/Social Science Research: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment, Retention and Effective Mentoring

Moderator: Robert Johnson, M.D.
New Jersey Medical School – UMDNJ

Recognizing that the NIMH currently supports minority-focused training programs that range from the high school and undergraduate levels to specialized programs for pre and post doctoral to junior minority faculty and investigators, this panel focused on four issues: 1) what level of training has the greatest impact, 2) what are the measures for a successful outcome, 3) what are the most significant problems or barriers to impede this success, and 4) what can be done about them. Drawing from their long-term experience and commitment to directing training programs, these panelists provided specific examples to make their point. While each panelist recounted examples of success, and cited specific achievements of their programs, there also emerged, without prompting, recurring themes. Some of the major themes are: continuity across levels of training, long-term mentoring, students' expectations, partnering and continuity in funding.

- *Continuity across levels of training:* To achieve success, the program must be both *comprehensive* and *continuous*. *Continuity* in a program was defined by the panelists as a program that “...begins very early and follows the student throughout the development and training processes to professional development of the active, successful scientist.” *Continuity*, they maintained, is crucial if students are expected or are encouraged to embark on scientific careers. Students, the panelists agreed, must be developed at every level, and provided with a variety of activities from after-school programs for middle school students, summer camps, Saturday academics, and summer research programs for high school programs. Although examples of programs differed, program leaders agreed that students need to be approached in their early years and fostered throughout their school careers. Most importantly, students need to be introduced to research in an active way, with a ‘hands on’ approach as in one summer program where “...there is absolute and total involvement in scientific research.”
- *Long-term mentoring:* A recurring theme in this and other panels is the importance of long-term mentoring. The participants were unanimous in their belief that these programs will neither be maintained nor will they be successful without the involvement of committed, dedicated mentors who guide and foster students. Mentors are needed to help students translate their aspirations and expectations into tangible results, and who can help them see that there are opportunities that can be achieved.
- *Students' Expectations:* Frequently, students approach science with too high or unrealistic expectations. For example, they expect to carry out scientific research or *cure a disease* (frequently a disease that is prevalent in their community such as AIDS, diabetes, cardiovascular disease), and feel frustrated when instead of working on these diseases, they are compelled to understand the basics of

science, of biology, of mathematics. Panelists noted that these expectations need to be channeled, need to be broken down in a step-wise fashion so students understand that to achieve their goals they must become competent in the basics of science. At the same time, the panelists cautioned, students' aspirations should not be dampened or discouraged, rather they should be fostered and nurtured. Persons who work with students should provide opportunities for them to succeed, should provide opportunities for them to be exposed to research, and should introduce them to programs where they can have 'hands on' experience. However, taking the cue from students, who are passionate about problems of their community, there is a great need to "...develop more research in those areas that disproportionately affect the minority and diverse ethnic communities." It is important to them that their professional development relates back to the communities from which they have come.

- *Partnering:* To address the problems associated with attracting underrepresented minorities to research careers and to help solve the problem of *health disparities*, more than federal and university programs are necessary. Successful programs reach out to communities, to industry, to local colleges and universities, to public-private partnerships, partnerships that involve the entire community, to help solve a national problem.
- *Continuity in funding:* To maintain consistency, long-term mentoring, and a comprehensive approach to working with students, it is imperative for directors of these programs to retain their sources of funding. The panelists noted that it has become necessary to diversify funding and as one member said, "...to seek funds from many sources" because of the lack of consistency in funding and the limitations on specific grant mechanisms. Several members gave specific examples of times when they had successfully competed for grants, but once the program was established and students/faculty had been attracted, the federal agency terminated the program necessitating the director to 'find' another source of funds to maintain the consistency of the program. Members who noted that frequently the funding mechanisms do not foster continuity in training addressed limitations that are attached to some of the grant mechanisms. For example, few mechanisms fund all of the support that students need such as support for mentoring, statistical support and technical assistance.

Dr. Slavkin, eloquently addressed the problem of underrepresented minorities at the national level. He noted that a major problem in the United States is the "...deficiency in science and math competencies that will only be exacerbated unless we develop a national educational effort that yields a very large percentage of high school graduates with science and math competencies." He referenced a document U.S. Science, Engineering and Technology Workforce of the Future as a source of information that details the deficiencies in mathematics and science competencies that the U.S. is experiencing, so much so that the U.S. Congress changed the number of H-visas that our country has used to recruit foreign scientists, engineers and mathematicians and double the number of foreign-trained computer scientists. He suggested that achieving diversity in the workforce is a national economic issue, because our country's workforce in science, regardless of ethnicity, is becoming smaller. Just as trans-NIH approaches have been used to research the human and mouse genomes, Dr. Slavkin suggested that a trans-NIH effort is needed to tackle and achieve diversity in the workforce.

Panel II
Achieving Racial/Ethnic Diversity
The Perspective from Junior and Senior Minority Investigators

Moderator: Javier L. Escobar, M.D.
Robert Wood Johnson Medical School

This panel was devoted to presentations by researchers who have achieved success as independent researchers, the key factors and incentives that influenced their decisions to become researchers, and the impediments that they had to overcome to achieve this success. While each presenter detailed his/her personal experiences, there were several recurring themes throughout. These can be summarized as: 1) the urgent need to conduct “...research that incorporates historical, socio-cultural knowledge and environmental factors that influence behaviors and practices,” 2) financial needs, 3) the role of ethnic minority researchers at decision-making levels, 4) the role of mentors, and 5) the need for continuity in funding.

- *Research on cultural diversity:* This topic was the most critical of the points raised during Panel II. Research on cultural diversity is crucial because: 1) there is limited research that describes ‘within ethnic group behavior’; 2) the accepted practice for research is to compare African Americans or other ethnic minorities to whites; 3) most of the research on ethnic groups is conducted by non-ethnic minorities, and 4) training and other programs are designed without an understanding of cultural diversity and what it requires. The panelists cited data to show that of 14,542 articles published in five psychology APA journals over a 20-year period (1970-1989), 3.6% had African Americans as research participants and over a 25-year period (1970-1994) less than 1% of the published empirical articles reported having Latino research subjects or research participants. The researchers, as did others from the audience, strongly supported the need for research that is outside of traditional or mainstream research. What is needed is research that deals with the health problems of ethnic people, research that looks at the challenges that ethnic minorities face. All recognized that ethnic minority research will ‘ask different questions’ that impact on the community and research that “*is reflective of the social, economic, structural, environmental and educational realities of diverse populations.*” They noted that impediments to training minority researchers and solving the problems of health disparities would not be solved unless we “...encourage people to think outside of the box.”
- *Financial needs:* The presenters noted that financial debt is a crucial issue that discourages many minority investigators from pursuing a career in science. They cited their own experience and that of others when they found themselves financially stressed because of commitments to school loans, coupled with responsibilities to their families. They agreed that stipends need to be established that are appropriate both by geographical region and by the need of the individual. Fellowships that allow ‘time off’ from teaching and administrative responsibilities are especially helpful because they allow the fellow to spend time conducting research and publishing.
- *Role of ethnic minority researchers at decision-making levels:* There needs to be an ‘institutional’ commitment to diversify campuses and laboratories. Several of the presenters cited specific examples where minority researchers who were in decision-making positions, were able to champion the cause of increasing the pool of minority researchers – to ‘take a chance’ on those who may not have the highest GRE or GPA scores, but who have a great interest in research.
- *Role of mentors:* Echoing a theme from Panel I, these panelists spoke to the critical role played by mentors. While one of the panelists spoke about the dearth of mentors in her experience and the fact that she “...had to locate mentors who were willing to help me” the other panelists cited instances

when specific mentors had a profound effect on their decisions and research goals. One member recounted a compelling incident when after one prominent scientist rejected his prospectus for graduate studies, another scientist encouraged him to apply for the Minority Fellowship Program run by the American Sociological Association. He explained the impact on his life when he was accepted for funding saying that *"It wasn't so much the financing, but it was an institution that said 'we value you. We think you have potential'."*

- *Need for continuity in funding:* Just as in Panel I, the Phase II panelists recounted their experience with programs that were 'up and running' only to be disbanded because the funding mechanism either did not allow for an aspect that was needed, or the program was terminated. A specific example was cited about a program at UCLA where many Latino graduate students participated in the Spanish-speaking *Mental Health Research Center*. After a period of time, the center was no longer funded and sadly the participation of Latino students decreased dramatically. Later, the student population shifted to Asian American students when the center became the *Asian American Research Center*. Again, when the director of that program left the university and 'took' the program with him, the number of Asian American students declined.

Panel III

Minority Fellowship Program (MFP)

Progress: What is Working Well/How Can it be Strengthened?

Moderator: Roy C. Wilson, M.D.

Missouri Department of Mental Health

Dr. Henry Khachaturian, NIMH, provided an overview of the NIMH minority training programs, emphasizing that the research training and research career development programs at NIMH constitute a commendable 13% of the overall budget. Among NIMH's training programs are the Career Opportunities in Research (COR) Honors Undergraduate, Honors High School Research Education, Minority-Related Infrastructure Programs, the Minority Dissertation Research Grants, the Minority Fellowships Program, the Minority Supplement Program and the Research Scientist Development Awards for New Minority Faculty.

Presenters at this panel were representatives of five professional associations that support Minority Fellowship Training Programs (MFP): Council on Social Work Education, American Psychological Association, NIMH Minority Program for Neuroscience, the American Sociological Association, American Psychiatric Association. Each presented an overview of their prospective associations, changes to the program that were necessitated over time, their successes as well as the challenges that remain. Although the data from each of the associations were somewhat different, all of the data unanimously showed that each association has been highly successful in attracting minority professionals who are now concentrating on research. However, each cautioned that the programs are just beginning to reap the benefits of success and a great deal of work still needs to be done. They all noted that it is imperative to conduct an evaluation of these programs that will review *"...over 20-25 years of data that covers every aspect of training, including performance and career development."* Some of the elements that have contributed to the success of these programs are:

- *Changing programs:* One of the themes from this panel was their need to creatively change their program as the needs dictated. Whereas the initial focus may have been to increase the number of ethnic minorities who earned doctoral degrees, the emphasis in the past 10 years has been on creating

the next generation of mental health researchers. This has created a shift in the way the program is structured, the criteria used to select students, and the institutions where students are placed.

- *Continuity of support:* A constant theme of the entire workshop has been continuity in support for trainees. If the goal is to interest young people to commit themselves to a career in research, they need to be supported throughout the continuum of their training, including training at the post-doctoral level.
- *Networking and role models:* Attendance at annual scientific meetings is valued as an important part of professional development. Consequently, the MFP fosters and supports trainees to attend these meetings. Directors of these programs and their advisors believe that there are numerous benefits to trainees when they attend national meetings. Not only are they exposed to current research, but also they have an opportunity to network with scholars and experts in the field. This serves two major purposes. Not only do students hear about the advances in science, they have an opportunity to interact with these researchers who serve as role models.
- *Mentoring:* *Mentoring* is a theme that recurred in each of the panels. Each group considered mentoring to be extraordinarily important and cited specific examples where mentors have contributed to the individual as researchers. Members of these associations are now looking toward their 'graduates' to serve as mentors for those currently entering the program.

Panel IV

Progress in Recruiting, Retaining and Graduating Underrepresented Minorities on Regular NRSA Institutional Training Grants (T32) How Can Numbers be Increased? Moderator: James G. Townsel, Ph.D. Meharry Medical College

The panelists of this session **made it clear** that their goal is to increase the impact of high quality training for minority students beyond the numbers and the mechanism that the T32 mechanism provides. There was extensive debate about the *pros* and *cons* of this mechanism and issues related to training underrepresented minorities. Frequently in this discussion, panelists detailed the successes of their training programs that were not specific to the T32 mechanism, rather it showed that a comprehensive support system is needed to address the minority training issue and for example included support for literature searches, proposal development, coordination with other research training programs, and training in communication skills. While some members of the panel felt that the T32 mechanism is too limited and "...too little, too late" others felt that while this mechanism could not solve all the training needs, it is a mechanism that should be capitalized on.

PROS (and other issues):

- *Institutional commitment:* Institutional commitment is crucial in recruiting and retaining underrepresented minorities into research. Does the institution work deliberately and effectively to recruit students, to provide them with role models in faculty of color, does the institution support both faculty and students? These questions need to be kept in mind when addressing the level of institutional commitment. Some institutions are so committed to attracting minority students that it has set up special programs that provide support such as: full tuition, an adequate stipend, educational allowances, and infrastructure support by providing resources in proposal development and

dissertation research support.

- *Faculty support and mentoring:* The faculty have, in many institutions, become the key factor in recruitment/retention. There are examples when the faculty have taken 'ownership' of the training program and championed the recruitment, selection and retention of minority candidates.

CONS (and other issues):

- *Limitations of the T32 mechanism:* While discussing the T32 mechanism, several limitations were identified. This mechanism provides a stipend that is considered to be inadequate; consequently to make it work, the stipend needs to be coupled with other resources if it is to be effective. The active involvement of faculty is crucial, yet faculty time is not considered as part of this mechanism. Consideration should be support faculty time through this mechanism.
- *Limitations in networking/mentoring:* Just as networking was discussed in Panel III as a vehicle of success, several members of this panel noted the lack of networking as an impediment to recruitment and retention of minority trainees. With a lack of networking/mentoring comes a lack of advice, of acknowledgment, considerations for positions, publications and funding. Additionally, appropriate mentors are needed who understand and can help students make the language 'shift' from their heritage and culture to the 'mainstream.'

Panel V
Undergraduate and High School Training Programs
Moderator: Mr. Sherman Ragland
National Institute of Mental Health

Members of Panel V addressed the programs that are in place to encourage high school and undergraduates to consider careers in science. They told of the dearth of opportunities that existed for these students at their institutions before the NIMH programs, and the profound impact that these programs have had to date. Outcomes of success are measured by the special skills and knowledge that students acquire by engaging in 'hands on' experience, being part of a research team, developing research projects, and making oral and poster presentations at summer internship programs and annual scientific meetings. These programs have encouraged students to go to graduate school and to pursue careers in research. Also, those institutions that successfully competed for programs spanning the overall training time from high school, undergraduate to graduate programs are best positioned to offer *continuity* to their students. Panelists presented data on the high number of students who completed their programs and who have garnered offers to advanced-degree programs, or for other reasons, mainly financial, pursued more lucrative careers.

Elements of the program that have contributed to its success are:

- *Student participation:* A number of opportunities for student participation were cited, with emphasis on student participation in annual colloquia and scientific meetings, where students are encouraged to deliver oral and poster presentations. Internships at research-intensive institutions or with industry and opportunities to network with established investigators enriched students' understanding of the
- *Continuity of support:* Institutions that have garnered support at all training levels can effectively

train, develop and encourage students.

Challenges

- *Support for skills development:* There is a need for basic skills development including a focus on course work such as basic biology, mathematics, and chemistry; computer literacy and computer skills training; and oral and written communication skills that are required to critically analyze the scientific literature.
- *Infrastructure support:* Institutions that are teaching intensive as well as those that are research intensive, need infrastructure support such as ‘release time’ for faculty, support for mentors, and support for skills development.
- *Need for counseling/mentoring:* The issue of mentoring was again discussed at this panel. Individuals who are committed to personal and caring mentoring are especially crucial at this level. One of the panelists read a testimony from an accomplished researcher – one who is being considered for full professor – when she lauded the COR program, of which she was a participant, and the critical role that her mentor played during her undergraduate years. Mentoring may be taken for granted, yet it is one of the recurring and compelling ingredients to the success and when it is absent, a challenge to a successful training program.
- *Financial needs:* A major impediment to a person’s successful completion of either a training program or entering the field of research is financial. When individuals are faced with different opportunities, where a career in research offers considerably less than other careers, they **may** understandably choose the career that pays the most. Stipend levels need to be realistically reviewed and changed.
- *Issues of identity:* Critical issues of identity, language and culture need to be taken into consideration when designing and administering these programs.

III. Roundtables

Roundtable I High School and Undergraduate Programs

Members of this roundtable set out to focus on the characteristics of highly effective programs, the issues and processes related to trainees moving through the programs, and to look at ways that NIMH can assist in enhancing the overall effectiveness of the programs. However, they learned that this is a complex issue and spanned topics such as cultural issues that impact on students at the high school and undergraduate levels, and financial issues. In addressing the important elements of successful programs, they identified a comprehensive list that included many of the elements that were addressed earlier: mentoring including peer mentoring, getting positive feedback, and financial needs. Evaluation of tracking these programs was considered to be essential otherwise “...we will not know how well we are doing and we won’t know what we should be doing [in increasing the minority research workforce].” The group expressed the need to develop a dedicated core of people who are trained in the sciences and who are concerned about the mental health of our nation. The value of the undergraduate program was endorsed, however, the group agreed that more discussion on this topic is needed.

Roundtable II

Graduate Level Training Programs and Beyond

Participants in Roundtable II discussed a number of topics. They began by considering the characteristics of effective programs, how they can be assessed, but more specifically how to capture high quality data regarding trainees considering the limitations to follow-up and tracking, and agreed that *tracking* trainees remains elusive. Using the T32 mechanism as a point of departure, they moved into a discussion about evaluation in general, and what NIH can do to identify measure of success. What began as a discussion about evaluation in general, returned to focus on underrepresented minority programs. The group concluded “...*we have not been stunningly successful in terms of enhancing the participation of underrepresented minorities, especially over the entire career span*” and suggested that in addition to quantitative data, case study-type evaluations, especially in regard to the diversity issue, would be invaluable. The last three topics were: the heightened importance of diversity within the training program as a review criterion, role of scientific peer review and what type – either a training or scientific committee – is the best to review these training applications, and an expression of support (expressed in other panels) that the T32 mechanism should support faculty time.

Roundtable III

Underrepresented Minority Fellowship Program

When the members of this Roundtable began to discuss “what is program success and how can we build on the UMFP Training Programs,” they segued into a discussion about the goal of training in general. Instead of confining their attention to the success measures by ‘who gets an RO1grant’, they discussed the need to determine the impact that these programs have made over the last 20-25 years. During a comprehensive discussion, the following opinions were aired: 1) all research funding programs should have an element of cultural sensitivity built in to them, 2) people who are in decision-making positions need to be sensitive to helping trainees in all disciplines, 3) because of the comprehensive nature of the topics, additional discussion and networking are needed, and 4) trainees of all disciplines, social and biological sciences, need to be brought together. They lauded the Reports, generated by the various associations, as vehicles to show the major contributions each group has made and there was a strong consensus that without these organizations there would not be the progress that has been made “...*by minority scientists on issues of mental health and mental illness.*” There was no debate about the successes of the MFP Programs. The participants acknowledged that these programs provide the knowledge, skills, confidence, comfort, initiative, motivation and networked support for trainees to move forward.

Closing Remarks/Next Steps

Dr. Strete advised the group that the **next step** is to gather the information that has been presented at the workshop plus the workshop proceedings and to make these documents available to the Council and all who wished to review them. Members encouraged the NIMH to review the discussions and note that all groups reiterated many of the themes that were identified in one panel throughout the day.

Recurring Themes Throughout the Workshop

There were several recurring themes throughout the day:

- Continuity across all levels of training.
- Continuity in funding
- Long-term mentoring
- Cultural diversity
- Financial needs
- Networking and role models
- Institutional support
- Active 'hands-on' experiences

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